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STUTTGART

# ARCHITECTURE FROM AUSTRIA AND GERMANY



VIENNA



INNSBRUCK





RMIT lecturer, **RICHARD BLACK**, was co-coordinator with Stephen Neille of *5 from the 5th Continent*, an exhibition of five Australian architectural practices currently touring Europe. Here he discusses the work of seven young Austrian and German practices whose work is shaping the future of architecture in Europe.

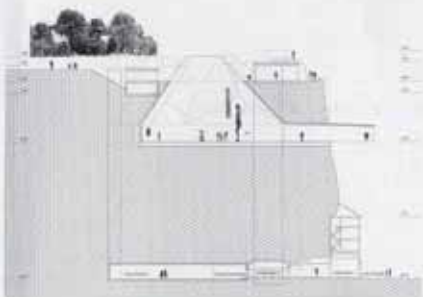
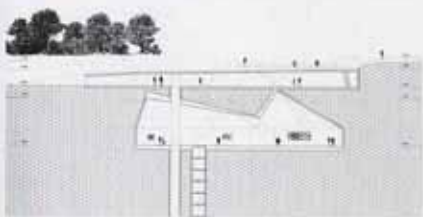
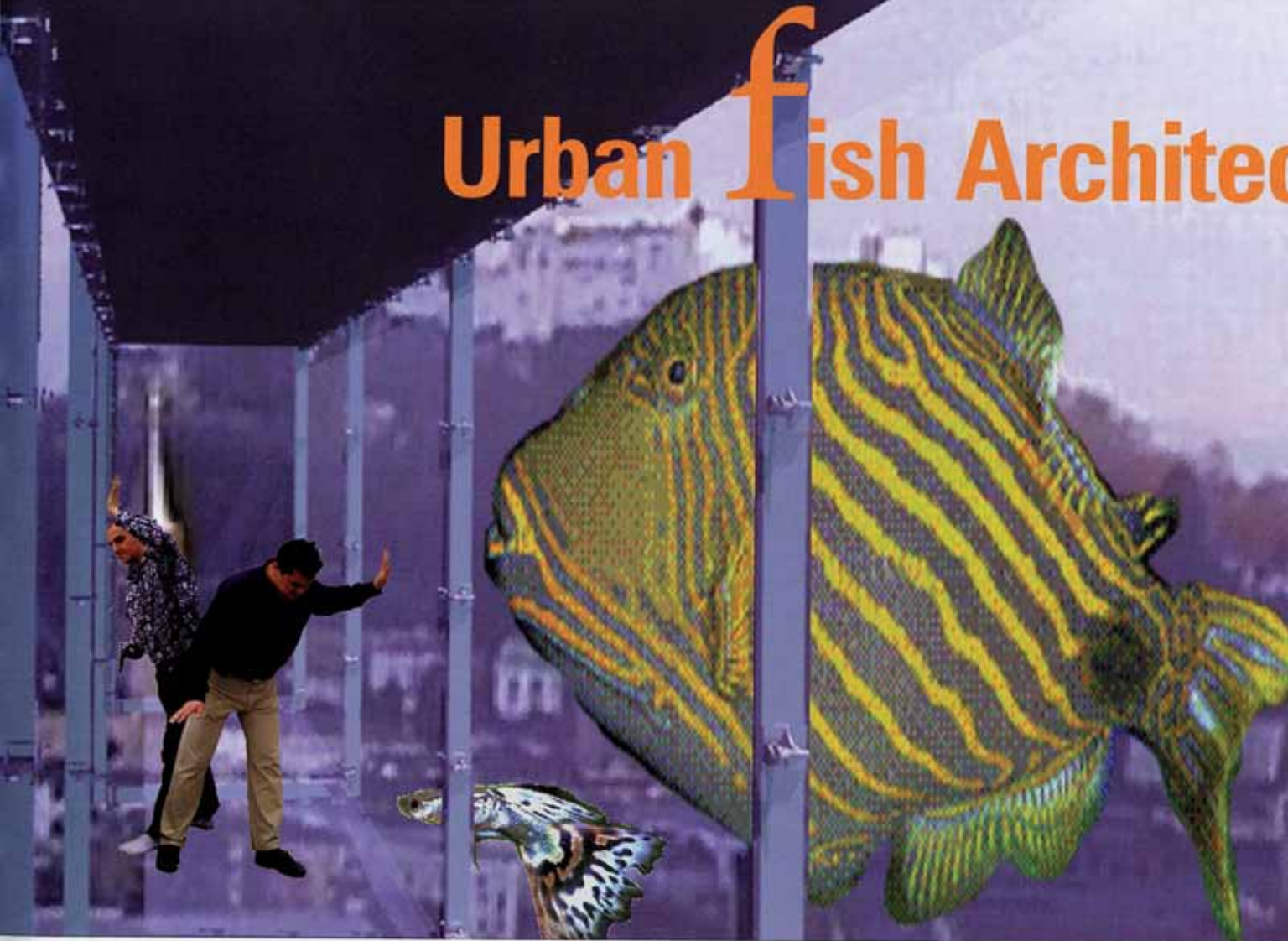
# MATERIAL PRESENCE

Last June, I travelled to Europe to take part in the *5 From the 5th Continent* exhibition of Australian architecture at the Architekturforum Tyrol in Austria. Following the exhibition, I travelled to Vienna, to the Alpine regions of Tyrol and Vorarlberg and, finally, to Frankfurt in Germany to speak to the architects featured in this review. My interest in these architects stems from their heightened sensibility for the presence of material in architecture.

Vienna: to stand in Michaelerplatz is to be reminded that Adolf Loos was a master of finessing material. In 1911 he designed the Looshaus on the edge of Michaelerplatz; a building for commercial and residential use. The lower levels of the building were wrapped in a veneer of Cipolin marble, a noble material, enlivened by rich veins of colouration patterning its surface. Could this be more than an appeal to the bodily senses? Loos had selected his material wisely. As an exterior cladding, the marble registered the shift in use within the interior and, as an elegant lining to Michaelerplatz, it set an appropriate mood for a building opposite the Imperial Palace. By using marble to register the architectural tensions between interior and exterior, Loos had demonstrated that building material could serve more than just the expedient rules of constructional logic.

The American architectural theorist, David Leatherbarrow, has suggested that "materials are invented by construction, location and inhabitation". Like the marble cladding on the Looshaus, Leatherbarrow suggests that building materials can serve architectural ideas. Projects to follow reveal how these qualities are embraced by a cluster of architects practising in Austria and Germany. They use materials in their "prime state" foregrounding the 'as-found' surface grain, patina, colour and texture to heighten the sensed qualities of opacity and transparency, thickness and thinness, heaviness and lightness of architectural enclosure.

# Urban Fish Architects



Mladen Jadríc and Manfred Berthold hold positions as lecturers at the Technical University in Vienna. They formed Urban Fish in 1997 and are seeking their first commission from the competition system. In Austria competitions are still the preferred method to select an architect for a building. The architectural journal *Wettbewerbe* (competitions) features winning and placed competition entries and indicates the prominence of this system of building procurement within the Teutonic countries. Prior to establishing Urban Fish, Mladen and Manfred had already collected several wins. Last year Mladen won first place in European while Manfred's entry for a housing scheme in Salzburg was placed first. However, it is uncertain if either of these projects will proceed to construction phase.

Featured here are a fourth placed entry for the **MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN SALZBURG** and a competition submission for a Performance Space in Graz which made the last 16. Both schemes develop ideas of building enclosure considered as an artificial landscape. At Graz the building has a clear object like presence, while the Salzburg scheme is concealed within the ground. Both treat the building as an accessible contoured surface connected into the urban space of the city.

Hidden within the mountains which surround Salzburg is the other Salzburg: a city of excavated spaces, tunnels, fissures and caverns. The other Salzburg is a consequence of centuries of salt mining. It is to this tradition of excavated space which Urban Fish reference in their recent competition entry for a Museum of Contemporary Art. The body of the museum was to be hollowed out from the cliff face. Their's was a museum without an exterior profile. Jadríc and Berthold capitalised on the potential to create space through the process of excavation, without the need to worry about a buildings exterior appearance. They sculpted a spiky cluster of volumes from the rock to house the exhibition spaces. However, the volumes are never completely concealed. Tips of each volume were contrived to gently pierce the rock container, signalling the presence of something hidden deep within the cliff. The glazed protrusions anticipate potential connections between interior and exterior, either as light, movement of the body or as visual connection. Elsewhere, administration, a cafe, a bookshop and a sculpture court are housed in a habitable roof slab. The roof is the only part of the building with an exterior elevation and, here, the museum closely resembles their Graz scheme. The roof at Salzburg mediates the levels of the adjacent cliff top park encouraging passage of people across the surface of the building. The design strategy for the museum seems to have been that of hiding and revealing the architecture. Urban Fish have crafted a subtle unfolding of this strategy by designing a building which would gradually reveal its architectural presence only after exploring the museums interior space.

# MONUMENT<sup>28</sup>

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